

Chapter 3

The Application of Web 2.0 Tools for Literacy Education

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ABSTRACT

Today's children enter classrooms with technology skills influenced by Internet surfing, blogging, texting, messaging, networking, and gaming. Educators should engage students with technology to teach them skills needed in the 21st century. Shifts in Web-based social practices call for changes to print-based pedagogies to include authentic digital forms of communication (Mills & Levido, 2011), as technology has changed communication in a global world. Web 2.0 technologies empower learners to participate in the location, production, sharing, and critical analysis of online text within an international, collaborative environment. The purpose of this chapter is to describe important Web 2.0 tools, the new literacies they reflect, and their applications for classroom use. The chapter will focus on current Web 2.0 practices and research on the use of these tools to improve literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first century literacy skills increasingly reflect the ability to use technology. A literate person must possess a wide range of abilities necessary to problem-solve, collaborate, and present information through multimedia. The International Reading Association (IRA) stated that the literacies used by today's students are much different from those of their parents, or even those of students from

just a decade ago (IRA, 2009). The IRA adopted a position statement titled *New Literacies and the 21st Century Technologies*, which noted that in order "to become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in the literacies of the 21st century technologies" (p. 1).

Literacies of the 21st century require new skills. Reading and writing tasks are no longer static and linear. Driven by digital technology development, literacy has evolved to incorporate a continuous

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process of change in the ways individuals read, write, view, listen, compose, and communicate information (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Not only must students be able to read and discern content online, they must also navigate and use new technologies, which challenge students' abilities to comprehend electronic, or digital, text (Coiro, 2011). "Electronic texts that incorporate hyperlinks and hypermedia . . . require skills and abilities beyond those required for the comprehension of conventional, linear print" (RRSG, 2002, p. 14). In addition, social media influences changes to today's literacy skills (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Schlager, Farooq, Fusco, Schank, & Dwyer, 2009). Researchers defined the changes in traditional views of literacy as *new literacies* (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Kress, 2010; Leu, 2011). New literacies are skills that "allow us to use the Internet . . . to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers to others" (Leu, et al., 2004, p. 1572). Literacies are continuously new, changing as technologies for literacy change (Leu, 2011).

Web 2.0 applications contribute to the expanding notions of new literacies. Richardson (2009) stated that 90% of connected students use Web 2.0 technologies outside of school. Yet, the education system as a whole undervalues this popular use of technology to support literacy. Policy makers have identified the need to align curriculum to skills students use in their daily lives. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education published the *National Education Technology Plan*. The plan recognized that technology is integral to almost every aspect of life and work; therefore, educators should embrace technology with authentic applications to prepare students for a world where professionals routinely use the Web and tools, such as wikis, blogs, and digital content for the

research, collaboration, and communication demanded in the workplace. "The challenge for our education system is to leverage the learning sciences and modern technology to create engaging, relevant, and personalized learning experiences for all learners that mirror students' daily lives and the reality of their futures" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 8).

How are teachers applying Web 2.0 tools to improve literacy? Factors complicating empirically based guidance on the best practices to use with new technologies for reading instruction include the lack of studies, the growing and changing technological tools, and the time needed for new technologies to be introduced, implemented, and studied (Blanchard & Farstrup, 2011). Yet, "technologies used outside of school [such as cameras, iPods, tablets, and phones] are finding their way into classrooms, with or without instructional intention, and they stand a good chance of influencing reading and reading instruction" (p. 301). Knowledge concerning Web 2.0 technologies and their applications continue to expand as researchers explore the use of these tools for classroom instruction. The objective of this chapter is to show how Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and media sharing can provide opportunities to build 21st century literacy skills. This chapter will define and explore Web 2.0 tools, present current classroom practices, examine current research on Web 2.0 applications, outline challenges, and provide recommendations and future research directions.

BACKGROUND

Web 2.0 technologies provide tools that can be integrated into classroom instruction to improve literacy skills. Due to the nature of Web 2.0 technology, literacy tasks utilized in this environment differ from traditional reading and writing tasks. Web 1.0 is the read-only Internet in which most

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